

*Western Grain Stabilization*

all these setbacks to the Liberal Party during these years, it would have learned a lesson.

The bill before us today is an improvement over the 1971 bill, but it does have many deficiencies. Again, I believe the minister is trying to stay away from some of the input that farmers wanted. I would refer to the statement by the government House leader, in December, to our leader—and I believe to the House—that Bill C-41 was a priority matter and should be dealt with as soon as possible. He said we should set aside other legislation in order to deal with it.

This bill came into the House for first reading on December 4 and we were supposed to deal with it right away. Suddenly, other legislation got in the way and the government House leader had other priorities. One of those priorities was Bill C-44, which apparently was more important than this bill to establish a grain stabilization fund. If the minister in charge of the Wheat Board had really thought this was a priority item, we would have had second reading before Christmas, and during the months of January, February, March and April we could have heard from the farmers across the prairies who were able to attend hearings, rather than waiting until now when they are going into spring seeding. These are the things I believe could have been done had the government been serious about putting this legislation before the House.

It is very amusing to go back to some of the statements made by the minister in charge of the Wheat Board in 1971. I am sure a number of Saskatchewan members will remember them very clearly. The minister at that time said the bill could not be based on net farm income but had to be based on gross farm income. Now we have a bill before the House that is based partially on net farm income.

The minister also said in 1971 that there was no way to take into consideration the cost of production when calculating payments from a farm income stabilization fund. We have a clause in the bill that does take this into consideration to a major degree. These are things that could have been done back in 1971 and we might have had a good stabilization bill at that time. Instead, we had a by-election, with the government being forced to withdraw the legislation from the House.

This party has made it clear over the years that farm income must be stabilized. Farmers, more than any other persons in our society, are subject to fluctuation in the price of their products. The farmer is affected not just by weather conditions and by the crops of other countries but also by the free, open market in this country. This minister and this government have been responsible for promoting open marketing in Canada so that farmers now have the option of selling certain grains on the open market, an option they did not have a few years ago. When the farmer is faced with all kinds of difficulties such as the ones I have mentioned, he needs stabilized farm income. Our party has long advocated a stabilization plan based on the cost of production. Our party has also advocated a strong system of marketing boards in this country through which all farm commodities could be marketed.

We need a strong system of marketing boards in this country in order that we can have planned production and planned marketing, and in order that the farmers can have

[Mr. Nystrom.]

some say and some clout in respect of what they are to get for their products when they sell them in the fall of the year or at other times. These are some of the things that should be done. Our country should have, as an objective in agriculture, the mechanization of food production. We can only have that if we guarantee farm prices, and only if we have a grain stabilization plan that gives farmers an absolute guarantee. If we had marketing boards, with the farmers having some clout, then the farmers could make the decisions that are so important to planning.

The bill before the House today goes part way in that direction but by no means far enough. There are a number of clauses in the bill that we feel discriminate against the small producer, against regions and against those farmers who have the misfortune of having low yields or low prices over a series of years. For this reason, we intend to move certain amendments to the bill. At this stage, the most important thing we should do is to make sure that all members of this House realize the importance of holding public hearings so the farmers of this country who are to be affected by this bill will have the chance to present their case. A request has been made of the minister by a number of organizations, including the National Farmers Union, the Flax Growers Association of western Canada, as well as by a number of individual farmers, to hold such hearings before passing this bill. We should go across the country and have the farmers appear before us to tell us what should be in this legislation. That would be democracy at work.

There are many things in this bill that I believe must be changed. There must be input from the farmers, rather than from bureaucrats and technocrats sitting in their ivory towers in Ottawa. There are a number of things that should be changed, and I want to get to just one or two of them before five o'clock. At that time I will call it five o'clock and continue later.

One thing that discriminates against the producer is that payments from the fund are to be made in a general sense to all people who come under the Wheat Board area, and are not to be made in a regional sense. I feel that provision contains potential discrimination. For example, there may be a crop failure in an area such as northeastern Saskatchewan where we often have poor crops or crops with low protein content. Often our export commitment is in respect of grain of high protein quality. There is no provision in this bill for pay-outs to farmers who suffer because of poor quality grain. This involves one amendment to which I think we can all agree and I hope such an amendment will be acceptable at the committee stage. Participation in this fund should be universal. All producers should participate if this measure is to be effective and the fund worth while.

Perhaps at this point I might call it five o'clock.